



Public Affairs Section, United States of America

A Tribute to Chief Cyprian Ekwensi

Died on Sunday, November 4, 2007 aged 86 years



Pa Ekwensi and George at the late Chief's Enugu home

It is a rare day when a literary icon walks into your office, even if you are assigned to the U.S. Mission in Nigeria. I still remember that fateful day in early 2003 when my friend and colleague, Dr. Wendy Simmons, came into my office to tell me that Chief Cyprian Ekwensi was in our Lagos Information Resource Center. I knew that I had to respond to the call and I am so very glad that I did.

During the ensuing four years, Chief Ekwensi became a cherished friend and literary mentor. Indeed, he encouraged me to put my pen to paper and write *The Last Flight To Enugu*, a short story that chronicled my experiences as an international election observer in 2003. Chief Ekwensi was a patient teacher and consistently demonstrated a willingness to explain the

complexities of this remarkable country, Nigeria to me.

He was almost 40 years my senior. He was born, raised and educated on the opposite end of the planet and yet Chief Cyprian Ekwensi had a profound, indeed indelible, impact upon my life and my practice of diplomacy. Our curiosity about the human spirit and love of literature drew us together as friends. Indeed, my life has been enriched by my association with one of Nigeria's national treasures. Rest well, dear friend, you have most certainly earned it.

Atim Encida George is the Counselor for Public Affairs at the U.S. Mission in Nigeria.

The Ekwensi family has approved the content of this Tribute.